DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 147 RC 021 293

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TITLE Chiji Processing Cards and Non-Directive Facilitated Processing.
PUB DATE 1997-11-00
NOTE 12p.; In: Deeply Rooted, Branching Out, 1972-1997. Annual AEE International Conference Proceedings; see RC 021 269.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adventure Education; *Discovery Learning; Discussion (Teaching Technique); Elementary Secondary Education; *Experiential Learning; *Group Discussion; Higher Education; *Questioning Techniques; *Self Disclosure (Individuals)
IDENTIFIERS *Chiji Processing Cards; *Debriefing; Facilitators

ABSTRACT

Creating a nonthreatening atmosphere, drawing out introverted participants, and relating the lessons of programmed activities to everyday life are a few of the challenges of quality processing (debriefing). At times, alternative methods of processing open doors when straightforward questioning does not. In some instances, alternative methods serve a group's needs better than traditional processing. Alternative techniques are usually less complicated, making them useful both to novice facilitators intimidated by processing and to experienced facilitators in new complex situations. Chiji Processing Cards is a new tool to help facilitators conduct processing sessions while minimally manipulating discussion. Initially tested on ropes courses and wilderness trips, the final product is now being used in adventure programs, summer camps, school and university courses, hospital psychiatric and rehabilitation services, and corporate leadership seminars. Consisting of 48 pictures (e.g., lighthouse, sunrise, turtle), the cards are tangible images upon which participants in an experiential education activity can formulate their feelings and opinions. This article explains Chiji Processing Cards, their basic use, and their strengths and limitations; discusses the education theory behind the cards, clarifying their place in the spectrum of alternative processing methods as a form of nondirective facilitated processing; and describes modifications of their use to specific circumstances. (Author/TSP)

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Chiji Processing Cards and Non-directive Facilitated Processing

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ED 414 147

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ABSTRACT

Creating a nonthreatening atmosphere, drawing out introverted participants, and relating the lessons of programmed activities to everyday life are a few of the challenges of quality processing (debriefing). At times, alternative methods of processing open doors when straightforward questioning does not. Chiji Processing Cards is a new tool to help facilitators conduct processing sessions while minimally manipulating discussion. Consisting of 48 pictures (e.g., lighthouse, sunrise, turtle), the cards are tangible images upon which participants of an experiential education activity can formulate their feelings and opinions. This article 1) explains Chiji Processing Cards and their use, and 2) discusses the educational theory behind the cards, clarifying their place in the spectrum of alternative processing methods.

Introduction

It may be a slight oversimplification to state it this way, but there are basically two ways to become a better processor. The first way is to recognize traditional processing as one of the fundamental skills of experiential education and that it is a skill that requires ongoing training and practice. Traditional

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processing is the sharing circle, the time out, the temporary break from the primary activity during which participants discuss feelings, insights, and concerns (Smith, 1993). Most commonly, traditional processing is a postactivity question-and-answer session conducted by the facilitator. Proficiency in traditional processing is the ability to consistently create a nonthreatening atmosphere and then ask the right questions, at the right time, with the right intensity. It requires an understanding of group dynamics and counseling, as well a competency in the Socratic method.

The second way to improve processing skills is to seek out and use alternative methods of processing. Examples of alternative methods include journalizing, dyads, concept maps, and rounds (Nadler & Luckner, 1992; Smith, 1993). In some instances, these alternative methods serve a group's needs better than traditional processing. Furthermore, alternative techniques are usually less complicated than traditional processing, making them useful both to novice facilitators who are intimidated by processing and to experienced facilitators who find themselves in new complex situations.

This paper is a presentation of one new alternative method of processing that facilitators may want to add to their repertoire. It is a tool called Chiji Processing Cards. This paper describes the cards, their basic use, and their strengths and limitations. In addition, the paper discusses the educational theory behind the cards, explaining in detail the cards' place in the spectrum of alternative processing methods.

Overview of Chiji Processing Cards

Chiji (pronounced chee' jee) is a Chinese word meaning "significant moment" or "turning point." Chiji is an experience that changes a person's life, but whether the change is for the better or for the worse depends on the individual's readiness and willingness to learn from the experience. The Chinese character

"chi" (not the same "chi" as in tai chi) literally means "key," suggesting that if a person has the key, then the significant moment can be used to open the door to new and valuable opportunities.

Therefore Chiji Processing Cards is a tool, like all processing tools, designed to help participants learn from experience. The cards are a series of forty-eight pictures (e.g., father time, a lighthouse, thunder, turtle) designed to evoke personalized metaphors in the minds of experiential education participants. The most common way to use the cards is as a debriefing tool immediately after an activity or field experience. To begin a Chiji session, the facilitator spreads all forty-eight cards face up in front of the participants. Then he or she gives the following instructions:

> Pick one or two cards that, for some reason, describe your feelings about today's activities. Choose carefully because, in about sixty seconds, I am going to ask you to name your cards and explain why you chose the cards that you did. The feelings may be individual or personal. They may be about the group. They may even relate to something other than what happened today, if today's events reminded you of that important idea or memory. The only restriction is that you choose feelings that you are willing to share with the whole group.

After all participants have picked and thought about their cards, the facilitator clears away all unchosen cards. Then participants take turns in naming and explaining their card(s). Usually the facilitator simply lets each person explain the metaphor derived from the cards, but, if deemed appropriate, the facilitator may ask a pertinent follow-up question to each participant.

Two brief examples of the kind of responses the cards elicit come from their use at the 1997 Environmental Literacy Institute (ELI) at Tufts University (as of September 1997, the Institute has relocated to the University of New Hampshire). The Institute is a two-week program for people interested in en-

hancing environmental awareness on university campuses. One week into the program, the Chiji Cards were spread out and participants were asked to pick the card which best represented their philosophy/theory for teaching environmental awareness at the college level. A chemistry professor from the West Coast chose the "sun" card, explaining that the sun represented both science and aesthetics: science because the sun is the ultimate source of energy on earth, aesthetics because of the beauty of a sunset. The director of ELI chose the "shattered pottery" card, explaining that for environmental awareness to occur on university campuses, the departmental structure must be broken down. Only then can a new interdisciplinary perspective flourish.

Strengths and Limitations of Chiji Cards

The most obvious strength of Chiji Processing Cards is that they are easy to use. An inexperienced facilitator, especially one still struggling with the mechanics of a program, can use Chiji Cards without adding the burden of traditional processing to his or her concerns. When used in the basic way just described in the previous section of this article, a facilitator-in-training can easily bring closure to an activity and allow participants the opportunity to express their feelings.

A second more substantial strength of Chiji Cards is that they are as nonthreatening to participants as they are to processors. The cards provide a tangible object upon which participants can attach their thoughts. This helps to give the thoughts shape and substance, and the responses of the participants often have greater depth than the cliché responses about teamwork, self-esteem, and so forth, that too often come out of traditional sharing circles. Because the participants can talk about the card rather than about themselves, they sometimes express thoughts that otherwise would stay unsaid. The cards are especially useful at drawing out quiet or introverted members of the group.

It should be noted, however, that a processing session using Chiji Cards usually elicits a wide range of comments. With forty-eight different cards, and each card open to a variety of interpretations, this processing method takes a shotgun approach. Stated another way, Chiji Cards rarely guide participants to a specific predetermined outcome or goal (see the next section of this article about non-directive facilitation). If a group has fourteen participants, Chiji Cards will likely elicit fourteen different insights. This, of course, is wonderful if the facilitator has a very broad-based agenda and he or she really wants to hear what each and every participant is thinking about. If, on the other hand, the facilitator wants the discussion to focus on a specific theme or goal, then other processing methods might be better suited for the task. When the first round of Chiji Cards reveals fourteen different, but equally valid, insights, it is not possible to have a detailed discussion about each of them.

Chiji Processing Cards work best when used selectively. Because they are easy to use and because they quickly capture the attention of participants, there is a temptation to use the cards often. Part of Chiji Cards' appeal is their novelty, so they should be used only once, maybe twice, with any particular group. Better to use the cards too seldom than to hear the complaint, "Not the cards again."

Non-directive Facilitated Processing

While the primary purpose of this article is to explain the nuts and bolts of using Chiji Cards, their effective use is dependent upon understanding the basic theory behind their creation.

Most good experiential educators are constantly trying to hold that edge between overprocessing and underprocessing. Some, however, make the mistake of thinking of overprocessing and underprocessing as primarily a period of time. They ask themselves such questions as, "Should processing for this activity last

five minutes or twenty-five minutes?" or "Should I ask one more question with this group or cut off discussion now?"

Time is one factor in over/underprocessing issues. Anyone who has watched a processor begin well, then exhaust a valuable lesson with twenty minutes of rhetoric and redundant questions, realizes that knowing when to stop is almost as important as knowing what to do. But over/underprocessing, in addition to the time element, is the extent to which the facilitator manipulates the direction of the discussion. Underprocessing is allowing the discussion too much free rein, so that any lessons to be learned are lost among the idle chatter. Overprocessing, conversely, is too much facilitator manipulation. The processing becomes entirely the perceptions of the facilitator, with little or no input from the participants. The problem is that the amount of appropriate manipulation is situational, so a responsible facilitator is never sure when to take control and when to turn processing over to the participants.

Sometimes alternative processing methods are looked at as a random hodgepodge of props and gimmicks. This assessment is incorrect. Alternative processing methods are props, but they are not random — each is different to the degree that it manipulates the direction of the discussion. Processing methodologies actually can be thought of as points on a processing spectrum (See Figure 1). At one extreme of this spectrum is no facilitator manipulation, in fact the total absence of any formal processing at all because the experience was so powerful that participants internally reflect on their own. Commonly this is referred to as Mountains Speak for Themselves (MST) (Gass, 1993). At the other extreme of the processing spectrum are the metaphoric models of processing (Bacon, 1983). Here the facilitator exercises maximum intervention by front-loading the planned activity with an overtly stated metaphor. The participants are given the connections between the planned activity and a real-life issue even before the ac-

tivity takes place (e.g., trusting the belayer on the ropes course is analogous to trusting a counselor during drug abuse treatment). The theory is that the lessons of the activity will best transfer to everyday life if the assigned metaphor is constantly in the minds of the participants.

Figure 1. Processing Methodology Spectrum

All other processing techniques fall somewhere between the MST and metaphoric extremes. The more toward MST, the less is the manipulation by the facilitator and the less is control over what the participants derive from the experience. The more toward the metaphoric models, the more carefully the facilitator guides the participant to a predetermined lesson or goal. Traditional questioning and answering, for example, probably fall somewhere right of the center (See Figure 2). While not an entirely rigid technique, the facilitator's sequencing of a specific series of questions does tend to guide the direction of the discussion to specific conclusions.

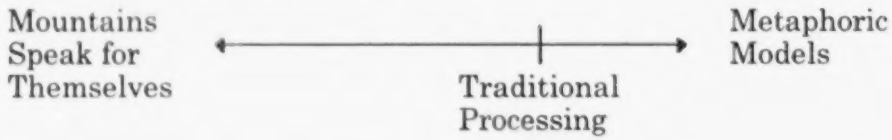

Figure 2. Traditional Processing's Place on the Spectrum

Chiji Processing Cards is a method of processing that resides left of the center on the processing spectrum (See Figure 3). They, along with such techniques as journalizing and concept maps, might be described as non-directive facilitated processing, non-directive in that the method does not determine the

direction of the discussion, but facilitated in that the experience is not left to "speak for itself."

In the last several years, experiential education, especially adventure programming, has become more prescriptive than in the past. Clients, especially those in the therapeutic and corporate arenas, want to have individually tailored programs with very specific predetermined outcomes. While experiential educators know well that no educational program can guarantee specific outcomes, they have taken steps to make their programs less free-form and more outcome oriented. In terms of processing, this orientation has led to an emphasis on processing techniques that are more prescriptive and best address predetermined objectives. These processing techniques are those on the metaphoric end of the spectrum.

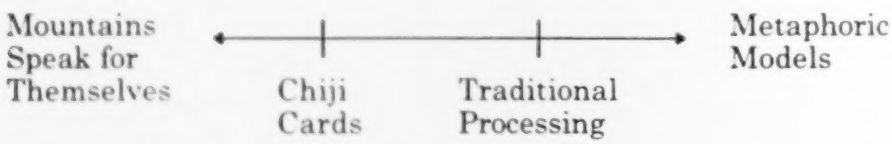

Figure 3. Chiji Cards' Place on the Spectrum

Chiji Processing Cards was a reaction to the emphasis on prescriptive processing. At the same time that improvements in metaphoric models have advanced processing a great deal, restriction toward any single kind of processing confines experiential education in general. Some of the flexibility and spontaneity are lost when predetermined outcomes consistently mold the experience. Criticizing outcome-based programming, admittedly, is a touchy subject, because experiential education without specific outcomes is open to valid criticism as well. Still, the spontaneity of individual interpretation of experiences is sacrificed when predetermined metaphors always dictate what is going to be learned.

The creation of Chiji Cards, therefore, is based on a belief that a full spectrum of processing techniques is needed, and that non-directive forms of processing have been slighted. Without techniques such journalizing, concept maps, and Chiji Cards, the only alternative to facilitator-dominant processing is Mountains Speak for Themselves. The choice becomes either a great deal of facilitator intervention or none at all.

Non-directive facilitated processing methods provide something inbetween.

Modifications to the Basic Use of Chiji Processing Cards

Chiji Cards' basic directions are adequate for initial use, but individual facilitators who find Chiji Cards effective will adapt their use to specific situations. The following are modifications that facilitators may want to consider:

Pair Ups. If previous processing sessions with a specific group have been superficial, pair ups or dyads may improve the quality of the responses from the Chiji Cards. After the participants have chosen their card(s), the facilitator asks them to go off on their own in pairs to discuss their cards. One person explains his or her cards, and the partner offers feedback on the explanation. Then roles are reversed. Participants then come together as a large group, and each person explains his or her card(s). The pairings allow participants to verbalize their explanations and get feedback on them before publicly declaring them.

Identity Card. If creating a group identity is desired, the facilitator may want the group to find a single card that best represents the group after sharing an experience. Instead of asking participants to find a card that describes their personal feelings, the facilitator asks them to pick a card that best represents the group. After each person has explained his or her choice, all of the chosen cards are placed together in the center of the group. The participants must then

come to a consensus as to the single card that best represents the group that day. The choice should not be a vote, but a true consensus. Every person has veto power, and no card represents the group until all participants accept the choice. Choosing the card then becomes an initiative in itself, so the facilitator must allow enough time for consensus decision-making to occur.

Combined Story. This activity works well with a small group (5 to 10 people). The facilitator asks each participant to choose one card that best represents the group and explain his or her choice. Then rather than the group choosing a single card that best represents the group, they compose a story about the group that incorporates all the individually chosen cards. Usually the stories are composed as a group, but they can also be written individually, and the group ends up with 5 to 10 different stories.

Transference Story. A valid criticism of Chiji Cards is that the statements given by participants about their chosen cards lack staying power. The card has meaning when it is picked, but that meaning is forgotten two or three days later. One way to address this problem is in the wording of the initial processing statement given by the facilitator. Rather than simply asking the participants to pick a card that explains their feelings, the facilitator may intentionally ask a question that forces participants to project into the immediate future. For example, the facilitator asks them to do something more in line with the following statements:

> "Choose the card that best represents the one lesson you will take away with you from today's experience — and use in the near future," <u>or</u> "Now that you have gone through this experience, choose the card that best represents the one thing you will do differently when you return to your <u>(blank)</u>" (job, school, family, institution, etc.)

Before and After. Even though it was recommended that Chiji Cards be used sparingly, one way to intentionally use the cards twice with the same group is first as a focus activity and second, as a processing activity. Prior to the experience, ask participants to choose the card that best represents their feelings or expectations or goals for the impending event. Let them explain their choices. Then after the experience, ask a similar question about feelings, goals, and so on. Again let each person explain their card(s). If the choice of cards has changed, ask why.

Conclusion

Chiji Processing Cards were developed by a university professor and two ropes course directors who wanted to conduct debriefing sessions without manipulating the discussion by their line of questioning. Initially tested on ropes courses and wilderness trips, the final product is now being used in adventure programs, summer camps, elementary schools, high schools, nature centers, hospital psychiatric and rehabilitation services, group homes, university-level education courses, therapeutic recreation programs, and corporate leadership seminars.

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